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ABSTRACT

In this attempt to explain parental discipline behaviors from an interactionist viewpoint that includes person and situation factors, the relationship of parental discipline behaviors to situation-specific feelings and cognitions and objective situational characteristics were examined. Data obtained from 300 families included (1) social demographic variables; (2) parental reactions, feelings, and cognitions in discipline situations; (3) family structure and climate; and (4) parental child rearing value orientations. Two main patterns of discipline reactions were found. A power-assertive pattern was strongly associated with objective situational characteristics. Anger and an apparent lack of understanding of the child's transgression were the two variables most associated with power-assertion. The second pattern of discipline reactions, induction-rejecting, were also strongly associated with objective situational characteristics. With regard to subjective situation-specific feelings and cognitions, a normative orientation in discipline situations was associated with a rejecting pattern of discipline reactions, whereas an instructional-learning orientation was associated with parental induction. (Author/RH)

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Parental discipline behaviors, subjective parental situation perceptions and objective characteristics of discipline situations

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In order to explain parental discipline behaviors from an interactionistic viewpoint in terms of both personfactors and situationfactors, it is examined which patterns of parental discipline behaviors are explained by which combination of subjective situation specific feelings and cognitions, and objective characteristics of those situations. Data were obtained from 300 families. Data collection consisted of social demographic variables, parental reactions, feelings and cognitions in discipline situations, family structure and climate, and parental child-rearing value orientations.
Two main patterns of discipline reactions were revealed, each pattern being associated with a particular combination of parental feelings and cognitions and objective characteristics of the situation.
The power-assertive patterns of discipline reactions was found to be strongly associated with objective situational characteristics (e.g. kind of consequence). From the parental feelings and cognitions only anger and an apparent lack of an understanding for the child's transgression were the two most important associates of power-assertion.
The second pattern of induction-rejecting discipline-reactions was also strongly associated with objective situational characteristics. With regard to the subjective situation specific feelings and cognitions a normative orientation in discipline situations was associated with the rejecting pattern of discipline reactions, whereas an instructional-learning orientation was associated with parental induction.

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1. Introduction

In the research on parental child-rearing behaviors the various discipline behaviors of the parent take a central position. By making use of a particular discipline strategy parents try to change the child's behavior in a direction parents view as more desirable. It is a common experience that parental disciplinary actions mostly are opposite to the child's wishes. It seems also apparent that discipline situations in which children experience some kind of pressure from their parent(s) to change their course of action are a salient feature of the child's daily life. It has been found that by two years of age about two-thirds of the parent-child interactions involve attempts by parents to change children's behavior agianst their will (Minton, Kagan & Levine, 1971). Since comparable data have been obtained for children up to 10 years of age, it may be concluded that children experience pressure from their parents to change their behavior on the average every 6 to 7 minutes throughout their waking hours (Hoffman, 1983). Parental dicipline behaviors are to be considered a kind of control techniques. Control techniques can be defined as all those behaviors employed by one person to change the ongoing course of another's activity (Schaffer, 1984). This definition is in close correspondence with the definition of control attempts as those behaviors of the parent toward the child with the intent of directing the behavior of the child in a manner desirable to the parents (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). There seem to be no need in the literature to confine parental control attempts or techniques to those situations where there is a clash of wills (Schaffer, 1984)
In this less restricted sense parental control attempts are found to be a very salient part of the parent-child interaction before 2 years of age. Schaffer (1984) reported that nearly half of all verbal utterances of the mothers had a control function (an average rate of one every 9 seconds). From the findings mentioned above it can be concluded that controls and socialisation pressures (both the indirect, subtle and the more direct and harsher ones) are salient from the child's birth on. Of course some important diferences may be present between early controls and controls later on. Differences for instance in parental compliance expectations, the child's actual compliance, the child's perception of parental controls or in parental control attributions. Parental control and discipline behaviors thus are a crucial part of parental child-rearing behaviors and socialization techniques.

In searching for an explanation for parental child-rearing behaviors and for parental discipline and control behaviors in particular one has either focused on

distal characteristics of the social environment of the child, or on cross-situational characteristics of the persons involved in the situation. In the former type of study parental child-rearing strategies are considered as determined by structural conditions of the social environment. According to ideational approach of socialization (Gecas, 1979) the influence of social class and most importantly the conditions of life associated with the occupation of the father is a major determinant of parental discipline behavior. This influence is mediated by psychological characteristics of parents such as the child-rearing value orientations of conformity and self-direction (Kohn, 1959; 1963; Kohn & Schooler, 1978). A second example of the influence of distal-structural conditions is formed in the sociolinguistic approach of socialization, where the relationship between social class and parent-child interactions and parental modes of control is mediated by the structure of the role system of the family (Bernstein, 1971).

In the latter type of study with a focus on cross-situational characteristics of persons one has looked for those psychological characteristics of the parent and/or the child which may have a decisive influence on the parental control behavior. From a personologistic point of view one has argued strongly, first that parents have consistent ways of reacting to their children's transgressions, and second that these assumed cross-situational consistencies in parental behavior mainly are determined by psychological traits or attributes. In the history of socialization research psychological orientations such as focus of control, achievement motivation and parental authoritarianism are found to be substantially affected by the socio-economic conditions of parents (Gecas, 1979). These attributes seem to be tenable as potential influences on parental behaviors. An authoritarian attitude for instance was found to be positively related to the frequency of parental discipline behaviors (Hoffman & Salzstein, 1967).

Although it is concluded that the literature linking the parent's personal and psychological attitudes with the quality of parenting is not nearly as rich nor as extensive as one might expect (Belsky, 1984), it seems reasonable to speculate that personal maturity, and psychological well-being is positively related to growth facilitating parenting behaviors. Such a general and overall attitude may be less informative than the more specific relationship found between internal locus of control, high level of interpersonal trust and active coping style of parents with high levels of warmth, acceptance and helpfulness and low levels of disapproval (Mondell & Tyler, 1981)

In contrast with the more distal characteristics proximal characteristics of child-rearing situations are rarely focused upon in explanations for parenting behaviors. The kind of misbehavior however appears to be a major situational determinant of the mother's discipline behavior. Harm against persons is found to be associated with psychological discipline techniques (reasoning, dramatization of distress), whereas destruction of property and lapses in self-control are associated with some form of power assertion (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Zahn-Waxler & Chapman, 1982). Another proximal determinant was found to be the situational circumstance that the parent had to deal with two competing cognitive activities (i.e. caring for their child and solving a mental anagram task). Under this situational, contextual

influence decrease in positive behaviors (e.g. responsiveness, support) and an increase in negative parental behaviors (e.g. interference, punishment) were observed (Zussman, 1980). In their behavioral simulation approach Vasta and Copitch (1981) found some evidence that agressive behaviors of the adults resulted from arousal generated by the child's aversive behaviors which were frustrating the adult's attainment of a goal (reward).

In the present study an interactionistc starting point is taken in trying to explain parental discipline behaviors. According to this viewpoint individual functioning is not determined by person factors or situation factors in isolation, but by inseperable person and situation interactions (Magnusson & Allen, 1983). In order to untangle these person and situation interactions two types of situational factors are discerned; within situational factors and overall or general situation factors. These two types parallel two levels of analysis (Magnusson, 1981). In the present study the situation (i.e. discipline situations) and the behaviors and perceptions of parents in those situations are taken as the central unit of analysis. These within situational factors are part of the proximity dimensions of a person's environment (Jessor & Jessor, 1973; Pervin, 1978; Jessor, 1981; Endler, 1981).
One unusual feature of this study is that no attempt is made to generalize across situations. Situation specifics are maintained throughout the study as the unit of analysis.
In the first research question, which is rather a preliminary one, the prediction is tested that parental discipline behaviors are most directly affected by proximal situational personologistic characteristics.
The central research question is which patterns of parental discipline behaviors are explained by which combinations of subjective situation specific feelings and cognitions of parents and objective characteristics of discipline situations such as kind of consequence of the child's misbehavior, age and sex of the transgressing child. The latter characteristics are called objective because they are not influenced by subjective situation perceptions of the parents.
A third question is which indications can be found with respect to the sequential nature of parental cognitions, feelings as subjective characteristics and objective characteristics of discipline situations.

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

Of the 300 families participating in this research 289 mothers and 215 fathers took part. There were 2.4 children on the average in a familiy. There were a total of 703 children in the families, the children's ages ranging from 4 till 18 years. The average age of the mothers was 40 years (s.d.= y.), and 42 years for the fathers (s.d.= y.).

2.2. Procedure

The parents were interviewed at home by 26 interviewers (graduate students) who had received a special training and feedback on try-outs of administering the set of measures. The respective measures were administered in the evening on a time that was convenient for the parents. The whole procedure lasted about 2,5 to 3 hours.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Social-demographic information

Social-demographic information was collected from all families during the initial home visit and included: a) year born, b) marital status, c) spouse's age, d) number and age of children, e) education of man and wife, f) occupation and occupational conditions of the spouses and ex-spouses, g) religious and political affiliation.

2.3.2. Behaviors, feelings and cognitions of parents in discipline situations

Parents were confronted with 16 hypothetical disciplinary situations in a random order. The interviewer told that she/he was interested in how parents react to children's actions, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers. The hypothetical situations were read aloud by the interviewer, while the parents could read also for themselves in their own set of cards. Three questions were put:

1) What/how do you feel in such a situation?
2) What do you do or say in such a situation?
3) Why do you do or say that?

From both parents a reaction was sollicited, the order in which they answered the questions being random. The parents' reactions were tape-recorded for transcription and coding.

Parental discipline reactions were coded by means of a detailed CDE-coding system (Category-system for Discipline reactions of Educators) (interrater agreement was 80%). In the present study four major categories are used:

a. Power assertion (verbal violence, physical and non-physical punishment or threatening with punishment, demanding immediate obedience).
b. Induction (point out to the child the consequences of his/her transgression, make the child apologize or to repair the relation with the victim, propose alternative action to the child, explaining to the child what and why).
c. Responsiveness (comforting the child, punishing or rejecting the person who had provoked the child's misbehavior.
d. Rejecting and denying (the parent explicitly rejects the child's behavior).

Parental feelings were coded in one of four categories: accepting, angry, fearful, distressed (interrater agreement = 95%).

Parental cognitions and perceptions of discipline situations were coded by means of the C-MPED-system (Category-system for Motives and Perceptions of Educators in Discipline situations) (interrater agreement = 78%).

The major categories of the C-MPED-system are:

a. Egoistic orientation (e.g. the parent does not want to be disturbed in is course of action, he/she wants to be let alone).
b. Normative orientation (the norm or behavioral standard is pointed out by the parent as his/her major motive in a particular situation).
c. Consequence-reasoning (the parent refers to the consequences of the transgression as a motive for his disciplinary action).
d. Child-orientation (showing an understanding for the child's transgression.
e. Instructional-learning orientation (the parent motivates his/her action by refering to the discipline situation as learning experience relevant for the child's future).

Family structure and climate

For the exploration of ideas of parents about the way their family should be structured a modified version of the Family Environment Scale was used. After a selection procedure based on item- and factor analysis three subscales remained which were sufficiently reliable, the original instrument containing 10 subscales.
The first subscale **Order** (17 true-false items) measures the degree in which rules, control, hierarchical relations and structured activities are considered important for the family (α=.75).
The **Intellectual-cultural orientation** subscale (16 true-false items) refers to the interest in the family in politics, science, and in cultural or intellectual activities or events (α=.71).
The third subscale **Climate** (16 true-false items) refers to the degree in which parents like the atmosphere in the family (α=.71).

The parental child-rearing value orientation scale consisted of three reliable subscales, which were obtained after item- and factor analysis: (1) **Conformity**, indicating the degree in which the child is expected to adjust to demands, rules and values of the parent, the family and the society (α=.80); (2) **Personal involvement**, indicating the degree the parent feels personally involved in child-rearing contributing to her/his development as a person (α=.83); (3) **Child-rearing as a burden**, indicating the degree in which child-rearing is experienced by the parent as a burden or as an impediment for his/her personal development (α=.83).

Results

First the Pearson correlation coefficients were examined in order to select those variables that appeared to be crucial ones for further analyses. Since the correlations are based upon 6.592 reactions of parents on discipline situations almost all coefficients became statistically significant. Therefore the selection of variables was based on a correlation coefficient-value of .10 or more.
As could be expected it appeared that on the level of within situational factors the correlations between parental discipline behaviors and more distal and overall features of the environment of the parent-child interaction, that is to say demographic variables, child-rearing value orientations and family-structure

variables are not significant (less than .10). The significant correlations were found between parental discipline behaviors and the more proximal within situational factors like parental feelings and cognitions.

Ten variables were selected: two parental feelings: (1) Accepting and (2) Angry. Three parental cognitions: (1) Normative orientation, (2) Child-orientation, and (3) Instruction-Learning orienation. Five situation specifics: (1) sex of transgressor, (2) age of transgressor, (3) kind of consequence, (4) whether the transgression is provoked or not, and (5) whether the parent or another person is the victim of the child's transgression.

These ten variables were used as predictor variables in a canonical correlation and a regression analysis. Canonical analysis allows each of two sets of variables (criterion and predictor variables) to become aggregated to a limited number of orthogonal functions. Variables that loaded less than .20 on any function were deleted; also variables were deleted that loaded equally high on both functions that resulted from the analysis.

The final pattern of loadings is presented in table 1. As can be seen in table 1 two significant canonical functions were found. The value of the first function is .25, and .09 for the second function. In table 1 the standardized coefficients (loadings) of both the criterion variables (parental discipline behaviors) and the predictor variables on the two canonical functions are represented.

The first canonical function shows a pattern of loadings for criterion and predictor variables which seems to be characteristic for a rather traditionalistic authoritarian way of perceiving and handling discipline encounters. As can be seen in table 1 in function I a high negative loading of power asesertion and a lack of responsiveness is combined with a frequent occurence of an angry emotional reaction, as can be inferred from the negative loading of the Angry-variable. From the negative loading of norm orientation (-.13) can be inferred that those parents make a moderate reference to a behavioral standard as a motive for their discipline reaction. From the opposite loading (positive) of the variable child-orientation it is apparent that there is a lack of positive understanding for the behavior and intentions of the transgressing child. From table 1 it appears also that the most influential situation specifics are the kind of consequence (canonical loading = -.45) and whether the transgression is provoked or not (canonical loading = -.52). This means that more power assertion is used when the transgression has personal consequences and when the transgression is not provoked. From the opposite (positive) loading of set and age of the transgressor which are rather moderate (see table 1) it may be inferred that the parental use of power assertion is somewhat attenuated when the transgressor is a girl or rather young.

From the loadings on the second canonical function (see table 1) a more inductive way of handling and perceiving discipline encounters can be inferred. Apparentaly parental induction is combined with a rather high degree of rejection, that is to say that the misbehavior of the child is rejected explicitly and taken as a starting point for inductive reasoning as well. This pattern of parental behavior seems to lack both power-assertive and responsive features as indicated by the opposite (negative) loadings of the respective variables (see table 1). The parental cognitions going together with the inductive-rejective behavior pattern seem to centralize around a

normative orientation and an instructional-learing orientation. That is to say that parents with this behavioral pattern are focused upon instructing and learning the child with regard to future situations, while also stipulating and making explicit for themselves the norm or behavioral standard that is transgressed. The opposite (negative) loadings of kind of consequence and victim (see table 1) indicate that the induction-regression pattern is less articulated when there is a personal consequence and when the parent him-/herself is the victim.

A multiple regression analysis was performed for each major category of discipline behavior to see which feelings and cognitions parents subjectively expeirence and which objective situation specifics are associated with the respective discipline behavior. The resulting regression weights with the corresponding T-values are presented in table 2.
For the rejecting discipline behavior the parental cognition of a normative orientation seems to be very characteristic as is indicated by a high T-value (see table 2). From the T-values of kind of consequence and victim it can be inferred that the rejective behaviors are also largely predictable when the parent him-/herself is the victim of child's transgression.
In table 2 it can be seen that the power assertive behaviors of parents are most strongly associated with an angry feeling, the absence of an understanding for the child's transgression, and moderately with a normative orientation. From the T-values of the situation specifics in table 2 it appears that power-assertive behavior is also very strongly associated by all five situation specific characteristics; that is to say, that the parental power assertion is harsher when there are material consequences, when the transgression is not provoked, when the victim is a person other than the parent, when the transgressor is a boy, and when the transgressor is relatively older.
The third parental pattern of discipline in table 2 is induction. Inductive reactions of parents in discipline sitautions seem mainly associated with an instructional-learning orientation of the parent, and with kind of consequence (i.e. when there are personal consequences the discipine reactions of parents are more inductive). From table 2 it can be inferred that a normative orientation of parents in discipline situations seems a less important part of an inductive pattern, than was suggested in the description of the inductive-rejecting pattern in table 1.
A responsive reaction pattern in discipline situations, as presented in table 2, esems to be associated most strongly with child oriented cognitions of the parent (that is a positive understanding for the child's behavior), and with the situational circumstance that the transgression is provoked. The statistically significant positive T-value of sex of transgressor in table 2 indicates that parents tend to react more in a responsive way when the transgressing child is a girl.

4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate which combination of parental feelings, perceptions, cognitions, and situational characteristics is associated with a

particular pattern of parental reactions in discipline encounters. The results of the canonical correlation analysis was found to be consistent with those of a multiple regression analysis. Two main patterns of discipline reactions were revealed: a power-assertive one and an induction-rejecting one. It was found that power-assertive reactions are strongly associated with objective situational characteristics (e.g. kind of consequence). From the subjective situation specific feelings and cognitions only anger and an apparent lack of an understanding for the child's transgression appeared to be the two most important associates of a power-assertive reaction.
The subjective situation specific feelings and cognitions associated with the second main pattern of induction-rejecting reactions were a normative orientation and an instructional learning orientation. The results of the regression analysis indicated that this second pattern can be distinguished in a rejecting and an inductive set. The set of variables characteristic for a rejecting pattern of discipline reactions appeared to be a normative orientation.
From the regression analysis it appeared: (1) that this second pattern could be subdivided in a rejecting and an inductive set, (2) that a normative orientation was strongly associated with the rejecting pattern of discipline reactions, and (3) that an instructional-learning orientation of parents is highly characteristic for an inductive pattern. With regard to the *objective* situation specifics, for both patterns of induction and rejecting behaviors it was found that personal consequences (in stead of material) and the parent him-/herself as a victim of the child's transgression (in stead of an other person) are most important.

The patterns of parental reactions in discipline situations resulting from this study cannot be interpreted in terms of a personal style by which the behavior of the parent in most situations could be characterized. As a consequence of using the situation and its proximal features as a unit of analysis the results of this study are to be understood as a conglomerate of subjective and objective situation specifics. For both patterns of discipline reactions objective situation specifics appeared to be strong associates, whereas (subjective) parental feelings were most indicative for power assertive reactions, and (subjective) parental cognitions were strong associates for inductive and rejecting reactions.
In line with an interactionistic viewpoint an attempt is made in this study to consider the person in the situation as the meaningful unit of analysis. According to the interactionistic approach person and environment are not separable entities but both form an indivicible whole. As a consequence neither the person nor the situation taken alone can be considered as the appropriate unit of analysis. An important restriction of this study is that subjective situation specifics (i.e. behavioral reactions, feelings and cognitions of parents) along with objective situation specifics are considered as rather static entities. The discipline situations used in this study do not encompass the ongoing process of sequences of behaviors, reactions, feelings and cognitions of the parent, nor is revealed the way these reactions, feelings and cognitions develop during disciplining event, or how this flow of parental reactions is affected by the child as an interaction partner.

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Table 1: Canonical correlation analysis (standardized) between four parental discipline behaviors as criterion variables and parental feelings, cognitions and situation specifics as predictor variables

	Canonical functions	
	I	II
Parental Discipline Behaviors		
- Rejection	.07	.49
- Power assertion	-.80	-.06
- Induction	.01	.76
- Responsiveness	.49	-.37
Parental Feelings		
- Accepting	.03	-.09
- Angry	-.24	-.05
Parental Cognitions		
- Normative orientation	-.13	.28
- Child orientation	.38	-.26
- Instruction Learning orientation	.05	.48
Situation Specifics		
- Set transgressor	.26	-.06
- Age transgressor	.23	.15
- Kind of consequence	-.45	-.53
- Provocation	-.52	.39
- Victim	-.29	-.66
Canonical correlation	.45 (p=.000)	.28 (p=.000)
Squared correlation	.20	.08

Table 2: Results of a multiple regression analysis of four parental discipline behaviors as criterion variables and parental feelings, cognitions, and situation specifics as predictor variables

	Parental Discipline Behaviors							
	Rejecting		Power-assertion		Induction		Responsiveness	
	Beta	T-value	Beta	T-value	Beta	T-value	Beta	T-value
Parental feelings								
- Accepting	-.05	-3.77*	-.03	-2.05	-.01	- .98	-.02	-1.64
- Angry	-.02	-1.24	.11	8.97*	-.02	-1.47	-.04	-3.40*
Parental cognitions								
- Normative orientation	.09	6.39*	.06	4.40*	.04	3.06	-.02	-1.63
- Child orientation	.02	1.21	-.11	-8.75*	-.03	-2.10	.18	13.90*
- Instruction-learning orientation	.04	3.39*	-.02	-1.97	.15	11.67*	-.01	.75
Situation specifics								
- Sex transgressor	.02	1.49*	-.10	-8.87*	-.01	-0.47.	.08	6.33*
- Age transgressor	.05	2.46	-.16	-8.14*	-.01	-0.62	-.05	-2.25
- Kind of consequence	-.07	-5.54*	.22	18.77*	-.17	-13.61*	-.06	-5.36*
- Provocation	-.01	- .62	.17	12.03*	.07	4.32*	-.20	-13.43*
- Victim	-.18	-9.26*	.21	11.42*	-.06	-4.22	.06	2.99

* $p \leq .001$

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